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ABSTRACT

In a survey of 247 parents of gifted students in a pull-out program designed for academically gifted students in grades four through six in Midland, Texas, parents were asked how they participated in the program and how they viewed the importance of being involved in various aspects of their child's special education. Among the results, the survey found that almost half of the parents were meeting and exchanging ideas with parents of other gifted children, while the other half were not; that a third of parents reported that they were not meeting with other parents but considered it important; and that one out of every seven parents was not experiencing what they preferred in terms of communication between themselves and the school. (CR)

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Parents of Gifted Children: Are We Aware of Their Needs?

Prepared by
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The centerpiece of gifted education in Midland, Texas is a pull-out program designed for academically gifted students in grades four through six. The criteria for acceptance into the program is based on scores from nationally normed tests of ability and/or achievement, assessed portfolios of student work, and teacher and parent observation. Participating students attend special classes at the gifted center two full days each week and attend regular classes in their neighborhood schools the other three days. The basic curriculum in the regular school is compacted and accelerated to "buy" students the time for the extension and enrichment provided by the gifted program.

Sample and Method:

Parents of all students enrolled in this program were given a survey that asked how they participated in the program and how they viewed the importance of being involved in various aspects of their child's special education. There were 247 responses (one per household) yielding return rate of 55%.

Each of the fifteen survey questions contained two parts. The first part asked parents to respond "yes", "no" or "uncertain" to statements of whether or not they were having involvement experiences that the research literature supports as beneficial to the home/school partnership. The second part asked parents to rate whether the experience was "very important", "important", "somewhat important" or "not important" to them. Question 10 is a typical example.

10. I have been able to meet and exchange ideas with parents of other children in the G/T program.

In my opinion, contact with other parents is...

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Results and Interpretation:

The analysis of the survey included three levels of interpretation. First, each survey question was analyzed to determine the compatibility of the two responses within it. This process revealed if individual parents were experiencing what they believed to be important to them, and illuminated of several areas of unmet needs. The next step utilized a calculated weighted average of importance. The degree of importance was then plotted across a bar graph representing parents' reported experiences, confirming initially identified questions and shedding light on related discrepancies. The graphed responses to question 10 provided an atypical pattern.

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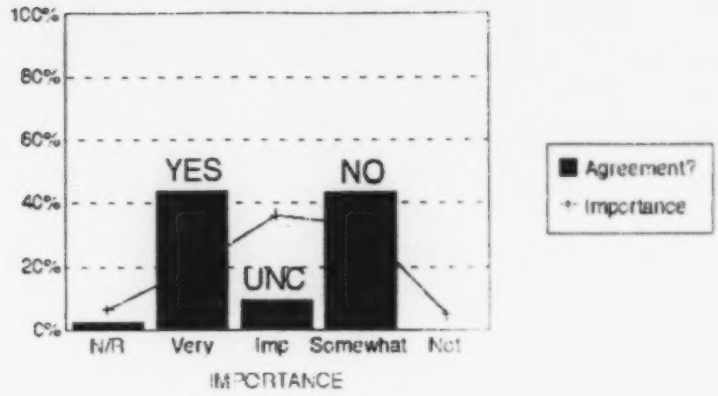

This graph shows that almost half of the parents were meeting and exchanging ideas with parents of other G/T children while the other half were not. However, the incidence of experience did not reflect the weighted rating of importance that parents placed on it. Furthermore, the compatibility of the two parts of the question revealed that a third of the parents who reported that they were not having this experience considered it as quite important to them and this represents about 16% of all parents. These steps lead to the conclusion that parent to parent contact is an area of need for a significant portion of parents.

As a third and final step, a theoretical model of parent involvement was used to explore the more global areas of parent needs. Three problematic areas were identified.

- The data indicate that out of every seven parents, one was not experiencing what they preferred in terms of **communication** between themselves and the school.
- A high level of discrepancy existed between parents' experiences and their interest in **connecting with other parents.**
- The largest discrepancy between the parents' wishes and realities dealt with **links between the gifted program and the community** at large.

Conclusions and Implications:

It should be noted that all of the factors of parent involvement addressed in this survey had some degree of importance to at least 75% of the survey respondents. In addition, those aspects rated as most important by these parents were generally being experienced by them.

Still, these parents did appear to have unmet needs, some of which were relatively easy for program officials to address to some extent. Interaction between parents, for example, staff members supported rejuvenating Partners for Excellence, the local parent organization for parents of gifted children in Midland. In addition, the University of Texas of the Permian Basin and Region 18 Education Service Center co-hosted a one day conference for parents of gifted children last October that was attended by 125 parents from around the west Texas area.

For additional information/survey forms contact:
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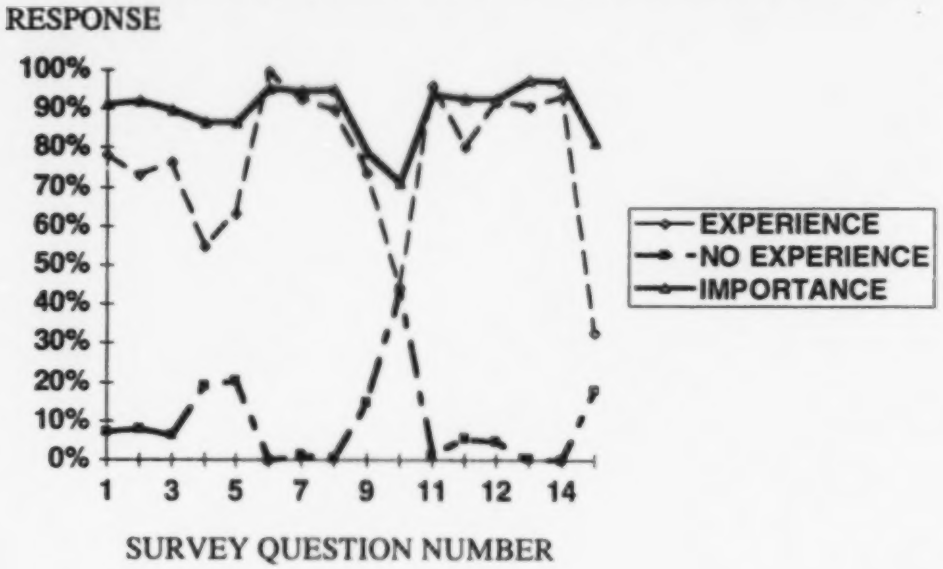
COMPARING WEIGHTED IMPORTANCE AND EXPERIENCE



UNMET PARENT NEEDS